

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Rawlins Field Office (RFO) administrative area is located in south central Wyoming (see Map 1.1-1). The RFO includes approximately 11.2 million acres of land in Albany, Carbon, Laramie, and Sweetwater Counties. Within that area, the RFO administers approximately 3.4 million acres of public land surface and mineral estate, 0.1 million acres of public land surface where the mineral estate is private, and 1.2 million acres of federal mineral estate where the surface is privately owned or state owned (see Map 1.1-1 and Table 1.1-1). The area includes the larger communities of Cheyenne, Laramie, Rawlins, and Saratoga and the smaller communities of Arlington, Baggs, Bairoil, Dixon, Elk Mountain, Encampment, Hanna, McFadden, Medicine Bow, Pine Bluffs, Riverside, Rock River, Savery, Sinclair, and Wamsutter (Map 1.1-2).

The public lands and federal mineral estate within the Rawlins Resource Management Plan (RMP) administrative area are the subject of this document. Neither this document nor the RFO's current land use planning efforts apply to lands or minerals within the Rawlins Resource Management Plan Planning Area (RMPPA) that are administered by federal agencies other than BLM, such as the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the U.S. Air Force.

### **1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR A NEW RAWLINS RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The RFO has the responsibility to prepare, and to modify when necessary, the RMP for the RFO administrative area. An RMP is a set of comprehensive long-range decisions concerning the use and management of resources administered by BLM. In general, the RMP does two things:

- Provides an overview of goals, objectives, and needs associated with public lands management
- Resolves multiple-use conflicts or issues associated with the requirements that drive the preparation of the RMP.

The Record of Decision (ROD) for the existing Great Divide RMP (the predecessor to the Rawlins RMP) was signed by the Wyoming BLM State Director on November 8, 1990. The Great Divide RMP provides guidance and direction for management of BLM-administered public land surface and federal mineral estate. The planning area includes five Wilderness Study Areas (WSA)—Encampment River Canyon, Prospect Mountain, Bennett Mountains, Adobe Town, and Ferris Mountains; four Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)—Jep Canyon, Como Bluff, Shamrock Hills, and Sand Hills; three Wild Horse Herd Management Areas (HMA)—Adobe Town, Flat Top, and Seven Lakes; and three Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMA)—Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, North Platte River, and Shirley Mountain Caves. Major

land uses in the RMPPA include mineral development, wildlife habitat, wild horse use, livestock grazing, and recreation.

On July 5, 2001, an evaluation of the Great Divide RMP was completed. The evaluation found the RMP to be deficient in the following areas as a result of changing conditions and demands on the area's resources:

- Although air quality decisions are adequate (i.e., comply with state law and standards and guidelines), there is a need for a regionwide analysis.
- Environmental justice has not been addressed.
- Old *Classification and Multiple Use Act* classifications and withdrawals are being used to protect various resource values.
- Management direction for utility and transportation systems and communication sites may be inadequate.
- Management direction for land tenure adjustment may be inadequate.
- Standards for rangeland health must be incorporated into all programs.
- The vegetation resource is treated as a subset of livestock grazing.
- Invasive-plant decisions are not included in the RMP.
- Reasonable Foreseeable Development scenarios are deficient.
- Protection standards for paleontological resources are lacking.
- Recreation uses and demands are increasing.
- Some county soil surveys are incomplete, or the status is not known.
- New ACEC designations may be needed, and existing ones may be outdated.
- Consultation on threatened and endangered (T&E) and sensitive species is incomplete or lacking.
- Visual Resource Management (VRM) classifications are outdated. There are inconsistencies between the Rock Springs and Rawlins Field Offices. The designation for Adobe Town WSA is inconsistent between the Rock Springs Field Office and the RFO.
- Federal and state requirements for water quality warrant additional attention as the RMP is implemented and updated.
- Wild and Scenic River evaluations have not been conducted in the RMPPA.
- There is some inconsistency with Wyoming Game and Fish Department big game herd objective numbers and migration corridors.

As a result of these findings, the RFO has decided that the Great Divide RMP requires modification. The name of the newly revised RMP will be changed to the Rawlins RMP.

### **1.3 PURPOSE AND USE OF THE MANAGEMENT SITUATION ANALYSIS**

The Management Situation Analysis (MSA) contains information about the physical and biological characteristics and condition of the resources within the RMPPA and describes how these resources are being managed. An analysis of the existing resource conditions and capabilities serves as a reference for developing land use plans.

This document, the MSA, is a critical, early component of BLM's land use planning process. The land use planning process ultimately results in an RMP.

### **1.4 SYNOPSIS OF THE MAJOR PLANNING PROCESS STEPS**

The BLM land use (or RMP) planning process, explained in 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1600, BLM 1601 Manual, and *BLM Land Use Planning Handbook* (H-1601-1), falls within the framework of the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA) environmental analysis and decision making process described in the Council on Environmental Quality regulations of 40 CFR 1500-1508, the Department of the Interior NEPA Manual (516 DM 1-7), and BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1. Table 1.4-1 provides a summary of the planning steps. As noted in the table, public participation opportunities are provided throughout the process.

### **1.5 MANDATES AND AUTHORITIES FOR PREPARATION OF THE RAWLINS RMP/EIS**

BLM's land use planning process (as described in 43 CFR 1600) intertwines requirements from two important laws:

- **NEPA of 1969.** "Utilize a systematic, interdisciplinary approach which will insure the integrated use of the natural and social sciences and environmental design arts in planning and in decision making which may have an effect on man's environment." Because the implementation of a new RMP could cause significant impacts, NEPA requires the analysis and disclosure of potential environmental impacts in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- **Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976.** "The Secretary shall, with public involvement... develop, maintain, and when appropriate, revise land use plans." FLPMA sets the overall tone and policy concerning the management of BLM lands.

FLPMA dictates that the BLM:

- Periodically and systematically inventory public lands and their resources and their present and future use projected through land use planning processes
- Manage public lands on the basis of multiple use and sustained yield

- Manage public lands in a manner that will protect the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource, and archeological values
- Preserve and protect certain public lands in their natural conditions where appropriate
- Provide food and habitat for fish and wildlife and domestic animals
- Provide for outdoor recreation and human occupancy and use
- Manage, maintain, and improve the condition of public rangelands so that they become as productive as feasible for rangeland values in accordance with the management objectives and land use planning processes.

The planning process for the new Rawlins RMP/EIS includes consideration of both FLPMA and NEPA. Other federal legislation has been enacted over the past 30 years to further establish a comprehensive environmental and land use planning framework. A summary of the relevant federal statutes for the Rawlins RMP/EIS process is included in Appendix A.

## **1.6 CONSTRAINTS REQUIREMENTS FOR CONSISTENCY WITH OTHER ENTITIES**

BLM land use plans and amendments must be consistent with officially approved or adopted resource-related plans of Indian tribes, other federal agencies, and state and local governments to the maximum extent practical, given that BLM land use plans must also be consistent with the purposes, policies, and programs of FLPMA and other federal laws and regulations applicable to public lands (see 43 CFR 1610.3-2 [a]).

If these other entities do not have officially approved or adopted resource-related plans, BLM land use plans must, to the maximum extent practical, be consistent with their officially approved and adopted resource-related policies and programs. This consistency will be accomplished so long as BLM land use plans are consistent with the policies, programs, and provisions of public land laws and regulations (see 43 CFR 1610.3-2 [b]).

Before BLM approves proposed land use plan decisions, the Governor(s) must have 60 days to identify inconsistencies between the proposed plan and state plans and programs and to provide written comments to the State Director. (BLM and the state may mutually agree on a shorter review period satisfactory to both.) If the Governor(s) does not respond within this period, it is assumed that the proposed land use plan decisions are consistent. If the Governor recommends changes in the proposed plan or amendment that were not raised during the public participation process, the State Director shall provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the recommendations (see 43 CFR 1610.3-2 [e]). This public comment opportunity will be offered for 30 days and may coincide with the 30-day comment period for the Notice of Significant Change. If the State Director does not accept the Governor's recommendations, the Governor has 30 days to appeal in writing to BLM Director (see 43 CFR 1610.3-2[e]).

## **1.7 PRELIMINARY PLANNING CRITERIA**

Guidelines have been developed to assist in preparing the Rawlins RMP. These guidelines, or planning criteria, are the constraints or ground rules that are developed to guide and direct the planning review for and modification of the Rawlins RMP. The planning criteria serve to—

- Ensure that the planning effort follows and incorporates legal requirements, provides for management of all resource uses in the planning area, is focused on the issues, and is accomplished efficiently
- Identify the scope and parameters of the planning effort
- Inform the public of what to expect of the planning effort.

Planning criteria are based on standards prescribed by laws and regulations; guidance provided by BLM Wyoming State Director; results of consultation and coordination with the public, other agencies and governmental entities, and Indian tribes; analysis of information pertinent to the planning area; public input; and professional judgment.

The planning criteria focus is on the development of management options and alternatives, analysis of their effects, and selection of the Preferred Alternative and the Proposed RMP. Planning criteria applicable to the Rawlins RMP/EIS process are organized into several categories:

- General Planning Criteria
- Planning criteria for specific resource programs
- Planning criteria for developing alternatives
- Planning criteria for analyzing environmental consequences
- Planning criteria for selecting the preferred alternative
- Planning criteria for using the NEPA procedure to develop RMP planning and management decisions.

The planning criteria for modification of the RMP to date have been developed in enough detail to ensure that the process is tailored to addressing the identified resource issues and to avoid unnecessary data collection and analysis. These criteria are shown in Appendix B. Additional planning criteria may be identified as the planning process progresses.

## **1.8 MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

The process for developing an RMP/EIS begins with identifying the issues. Issues express concerns, conflicts, and problems with the existing management of public lands. Frequently, issues are based on how land uses affect resources. Some issues are concerned with how land uses can affect other land uses, or how the protection of

resources affects land uses. The following preliminary planning issues have been identified for the Rawlins RMP:

- **Development of Energy Resources and Minerals Related Issues.** Special attention is needed to address mineral and energy development (such as oil and gas, coalbed methane, coal, solar, and wind energy) and related transportation network conflicts with other land and resource uses and values. Principal considerations include disruptive activities and human presence in big game (i.e., elk, deer, antelope, moose, and bighorn sheep) habitat, big game-crucial habitat (crucial winter range and birthing areas), and other important wildlife habitats (i.e., greater sage-grouse, plovers, raptors, and fish) and effects on recreation values, forage uses, air quality, sensitive vegetation types, and sensitive watersheds. Areas where surface disturbing activities (mineral exploration and development activities, right-of-way construction activities, etc.) are suitable, and those where these activities should be restricted, need to be identified.
- **Special Management Designations.** There are unique areas or sensitive lands and resources in the RMPPA that meet the criteria for protection and management under special management designations. Four areas are already designated as ACECs: Como Bluff, Sand Hills, Jep Canyon, and Shamrock Hills Raptor Concentration Area. These contain unique resources requiring special management attention. Three of these designated ACECs (Como Bluff, Jep Canyon, and Shamrock Hills) are within a large swath of land, running to the north and south of the Union Pacific railroad line, that is characterized by a checkerboard pattern of alternating sections of public and private ownership. Effective management of these ACECs is difficult within the checkerboard area. There are also three SRMAs—Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, North Platte River, and Shirley Mountain Caves—containing recreation values that require special management attention. There are also four proposed or designated National Natural Landmarks—Gangplank, proposed; Big Hollow, designated; Sand Creek, designated; and Como Bluff, designated—containing unique landscape values that require special management attention. In some places, unique or sensitive lands and resources are in danger of being lost. However, there are also concerns that special management area designations may result in too many restrictions on the use of public lands. Other special management designations within the RMPPA include five WSAs (Encampment River Canyon, Prospect Mountain, Bennett Mountains, Adobe Town, and Ferris Mountains).
- **Resource Accessibility.** This issue relates to the idea that the value of usability of some resources is enhanced by improved accessibility. To be used, resources must be accessible (in terms of legal and physical access) and manageable (in terms of ability to apply constraints or requirements to benefit other resources). Some areas in the RMPPA management area are isolated and difficult to access (i.e., legal and physical access) and manage. Land disposals and acquisitions could provide improved access and manageability of public lands.
- **Wildland-Urban Interface.** New demands are being placed on public lands due to accelerated growth in and around cities and towns and around rural

developments and subdivisions in the planning area. Growth has changed the way communities relate to surrounding public lands and has changed the communities' expectations. The basic problem is providing for public land management along with increased demands for public land and resources. Principal considerations include providing for healthy air and water quality, preventing water source depletion, reducing accelerated erosion in critical watersheds, and preventing fragmentation of critical wildlife habitat. Other considerations are providing for development patterns; transportation and utility corridor planning; and demands for open space and recreational uses, land tenure adjustment, and wildland fire management.

- **Special Status Species Management.** Attention is needed to address management of special status species (T&E, proposed, candidate, and sensitive plant and animal species) and the interrelationships of these species with other resource uses and activities. Principal considerations include management of species habitat to ensure continued use by these species. Areas where other resource activities may conflict with special status species and their habitat requirements must be identified.
- **Water Quality.** There are concerns associated with maintaining or improving water quality, and complying with state and federal requirements.
- **Vegetation Management.** There are conflicting demands for consumptive and nonconsumptive uses of the vegetation resources in the planning area. The basic problem is maintaining resource values and nonconsumptive uses while allowing for consumptive uses. Resource values include vegetative cover, watershed protection, maintenance and enhancement of riparian areas, soil stabilization, and maintenance and enhancement of wild horse habitat and wildlife habitat (particularly big game-crucial winter range and habitat for candidate, sensitive, proposed, or T&E wildlife and vegetation species). Consumptive uses include livestock and wild horse grazing, OHV use, vegetation removal by mineral development, construction of rights-of-way, and other surface disturbing activities.
- **Recreation, Cultural Resources and Paleontological Resource Management.** There are certain resources and areas that need protection while others need to be considered for more public and recreation uses. OHV use can conflict with other land and resource uses and can cause damage to resources, including wildlife and watershed values and other recreation values. Principal considerations include providing for suitable and sufficient recreation uses and facilities (both dispersed and commercial), VRM direction, OHV use designations, management of paleontological resources, and management of cultural and historical resources (of particular concern is the need for protection of significant emigrant trails, such as the Overland and Cherokee Trails; other historic transportation resources in the region, including prehistoric and historic Indian trails, early historic exploration trails, and Expansion Era roads; and Native American respected places). Visual values along these trails and surrounding Native American respected places are also an issue.